

AMERICAN CROW



Family: Corvidae, Crows, Magpies, Jays

Description 17-21" (43-53 cm). Stocky black bird with stout bill and fan-shaped tail. Smaller Northwestern Crow has hoarser voice; larger Common Raven has wedge-shaped tail.

Habitat Deciduous growth along rivers and streams; orchards and city parks. Also mixed and coniferous woods, but avoids closed coniferous forests and desert expanses.

Nesting 4-6 dull green eggs, spotted with dark brown, in a large mass of twigs and sticks lined with feathers, grass, and rootlets, and placed in a tree.

Range Breeds from British Columbia, central interior Canada, and Newfoundland south to southern California, Gulf Coast, and Florida. Winters north to southern Canada.

Voice Familiar caw-caw or caa-caa.

Discussion Intelligent, wary, virtually omnivorous, and with a high reproductive capacity, the American Crow is undoubtedly much more numerous than it was before the arrival of settlers. An opportunist in its feeding, the American Crow consumes a great variety of plant and animal food: seeds, garbage, insects, mice. Its nest-plundering is decried, but in orchards and fields it destroys many injurious insects such as grasshoppers and cutworms. However, the labeling of birds as either "harmful" or "useful" is misleading and antiquated. Crows do destroy many eggs and nestlings of woodland and meadow birds, but they also weed out the weak and feeble, and they alert the animals in a neighborhood when danger approaches.

BLUE JAY



Family: Corvidae, Crows, Magpies, Jays

Description 12" (30 cm). Bright blue above with much white and black in the wings and tail; dingy white below; black facial markings; prominent crest.

Habitat Chiefly oak forest, but now also city parks and suburban yards, especially where oak trees predominate.

Nesting 4-6 brown-spotted greenish eggs in a coarsely built nest of sticks, lined with grass and well concealed in a crotch or forked branch of a tree, often a conifer.

Range Resident east of Rockies, from southern Canada to Gulf of Mexico. Slowly encroaching westward.

Voice A raucous jay-jay, harsh cries, and a rich variety of other calls. One is almost identical to the scream of the Red-shouldered Hawk. Also a musical queedle-queedle.

Discussion Although sometimes disliked because they chase smaller birds away from feeders, Blue Jays are among the handsomest of birds. They often bury seeds and acorns, and since many are never retrieved they are, in effect, tree planters. They regularly mob predators, and their raucous screaming makes it easy to locate a hawk or a roosting owl. Although seen all year, they are migratory and travel in large loose flocks in spring and fall. Birds from farther north replace local populations in winter.

COMMON RAVEN



Alternate name: Northern Raven

Family: Corvidae, Crows, Magpies, Jays

Description 21-27" (53-69 cm). Similar to the American Crow but larger, with heavier bill and wedge-shaped tail. At rest, throat appears shaggy because of long, lance-shaped feathers. Often soars like a hawk. See Chihuahuan Raven.

Habitat Coniferous forests and rocky coasts; in West also in deserts and arid mountains.

Nesting 4-7 dull green eggs, spotted with brown, in a large mass of sticks containing a cup lined with fur, moss, and lichens, and placed on a cliff or in the top of a conifer.

Range Resident from Aleutians, northern Alaska and northern Canada south throughout western United States and to Minnesota, Great Lakes, and northern New England; in Appalachians to northwestern Georgia. Also in Eurasia and North Africa.

Voice Deep, varied, guttural croaking; a hollow wonk-wonk.

Discussion In most of its range, the Common Raven is common only in wilderness areas; despite its large size and demonstrated intelligence, it is very sensitive to human persecution and was long ago driven out of settled areas by shooting and poisoning. Yet ravens are primarily scavengers, and around towns in the North they compete with gulls for garbage. They also raid seabird colonies, consuming many eggs and young. They regularly ride on rising air currents and frequently indulge in aerial displays, with mock fighting, tumbling, and other forms of acrobatics.

GRAY JAY



Family: Corvidae, Crows, Magpies, Jays

Description 10-13" (25-33 cm). Gray above, whitish below. Forehead and throat white; nape and stripe through eye dull black. Immatures sooty-gray.

Habitat Coniferous forests.

Nesting 3-5 gray-green eggs, spotted with dark olive-brown, in a solid bowl of twigs and bark strips lined with feathers and fur and placed near the trunk of a dense conifer.

Range Resident from Alaska east across Canada to Labrador and south to northern California, New Mexico, northern New York, and northern New England.

Voice Whee-ah, chuck-chuck; also scolds, screams, and whistles.

Discussion Anyone who has camped in the mountains or the northern forests is familiar with this bird, formerly called "Canada Jay" and popularly known as the "Whiskey Jack" or "Camp Robber." This bird is very tame and is attracted to campsites, where it appropriates as much food as possible. It stores scraps of frozen meat, suet, or hide, gluing them into balls with its saliva and hiding them among pine needles.

AMERICAN ROBIN



Family: Turdidae, Thrushes

Description 9-11" (23-28 cm). Gray above, brick red below. Head and tail black in males, dull gray in females. Young birds are spotted below.

Habitat Towns, gardens, open woodlands, and agricultural land.

Nesting 3-5 blue-green eggs in a well-made cup of mud reinforced with grass and twigs, lined with softer grasses, and placed in a tree or on a ledge or windowsill. Robins usually have 2 broods a season.

Range Breeds from Alaska east across continent to Newfoundland and south to California, Texas, Arkansas, and South Carolina. Winters north to British Columbia and Newfoundland.

Voice Song is a series of rich caroling notes, rising and falling in pitch: cheer-up, cheerily, cheer-up, cheerily.

Discussion Robins originally nested in forests; where they still do so they are much shyer than the robins of the dooryard. They breed only rarely in the Deep South, where they prefer large shade trees on lawns. Although considered a harbinger of spring, robins often winter in the northern states, where they frequent cedar bogs and swamps and are not usually noticed by a casual observer, except when they gather in large roosts, often containing thousands of birds. The mainstay of the American Robin is earthworms. It hunts on lawns, standing stock-still with head cocked to one side as though listening for its prey but actually discovering it by sight.

BALD EAGLE



Family: Accipitridae, Hawks and Eagles

Description 30-31" (76-79 cm). W. 6-7' 6" (1.8-2.3 m). A large blackish eagle with white head and tail and heavy yellow bill. Young birds lack the white head and tail, and resemble adult Golden Eagles, but are variably marked with white and have a black, more massive bill.

Endangered Status The Bald Eagle is on the U.S. Endangered Species List. It is classified as threatened in all of the continental United States except Alaska. Our national bird suffered a dramatic decline caused by ingestion of pesticides and of lead-contaminated waterfowl. The main culprit was DDT, which was sprayed on crops to control pest damage. It leached into rivers, lakes, and streams, where it entered the food chain, absorbed by plants and small animals that were consumed by fish. Eagles and other large birds of prey in turn ate the contaminated fish. The main effect of DDT poisoning on birds was that it interfered with eggshell production, and the resulting shells were not strong enough to sustain incubation. Populations of many bird species, including the Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, and Brown Pelican, plummeted. DDT use was outlawed in the U.S. in 1972, and conservation efforts on behalf of the Bald Eagle, begun in 1940 when Congress passed the Bald Eagle Protection Act, finally began to have an effect. The majestic eagle is now making a steady comeback, and once again nests in areas where it was wiped out during the 1960s. However, it is still not as numerous as it was in colonial times, when it was a familiar sight along almost every coastline. Until 1995 the Bald Eagle was listed as threatened in Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin, and as endangered elsewhere in the lower 48 states; in 1995 its status was changed to threatened throughout the lower 48.

Habitat Lakes, rivers, marshes, and seacoasts.

Nesting 2 or 3 white eggs in a massive nest of sticks in a tall tree or, less frequently, on top of a cliff.

Range Breeds from Alaska east to Newfoundland and south locally to California, Great Lakes, and Virginia; also in Arizona, along Gulf Coast, and in Florida. Formerly more widespread. Winters along coasts and large rivers in much of United States.

Voice Squeaky cackling and thin squeals.

Discussion Bald Eagles are fish eaters, like Ospreys; when they pursue their prey they rarely enter the water as an Osprey does, but instead snatch the fish from the surface with their talons. Where Ospreys are common, the eagles obtain much of their food by stealing it from the smaller "fish hawk."

OSPREY



Family: Accipitridae, Hawks and Eagles

Description 21-24" (53-61 cm). W. 4' 6 "-6' (1.4-1.8 m). A large, long-winged "fish hawk." Brown above and white below; head white with dark line through eye and on side of face. Wing shows distinctive bend at "wrist." At a distance, can resemble a gull.

Habitat Lakes, rivers, and seacoasts.

Nesting 2-4 white, pink, or buff eggs, blotched with brown, in a bulky mass of sticks and debris placed in a tree, on a telephone pole, on rocks, or on flat ground.

Range Breeds from Alaska, north-central Canada, and Newfoundland south to Arizona and New Mexico; also along Gulf Coast and on Atlantic Coast south to Florida. Winters regularly in North America north to Gulf Coast and California. Also in South America and Old World.

Voice Loud musical chirping.

Discussion Ospreys search for fish by flying and hovering over the water, watching the surface below. When prey is sighted, an Osprey dives steeply, its talons outspread, and splashes into the water. It quickly resurfaces and, if it has made a catch, flies off, adjusting the fish in its claws so that the head is pointed forward. Ospreys declined drastically because of pesticides during the 1950s and 1960s, but since then they have made a comeback and are nesting again in areas from which they had disappeared.

RED-TAILED HAWK



Family: Accipitridae, Hawks and Eagles

Description 18-25" (46-64 cm). W. 4' (1.2 m). A large stocky hawk. Typical light-phase birds have whitish breast and rust-colored tail. Young birds duller, more streaked, lacking rust-colored tail of adult; they are distinguished from Red-shouldered and Swainson's hawks by their stocky build, broader, more rounded wings, and white chest. This species quite variable in color, especially in West, where blackish individuals occur; these usually retain rusty tail.

Habitat Deciduous forests and open country of various kinds, including tundra, plains, and farmlands.

Nesting 2 or 3 white eggs, spotted with brown, in a bulky nest of sticks lined with shreds of bark and bits of fresh green vegetation, placed in a tall tree or on a rock ledge.

Range Breeds throughout North America, from Alaska east to Nova Scotia and southward. Winters across United States north to southern British Columbia and Maritime Provinces.

Voice High-pitched descending scream with a hoarse quality, keeeeer.

Discussion The Red-tail is the most common and widespread American member of the genus *Buteo*, which also includes the Red-shouldered, Swainson's, and Gray hawks, among others. Like other hawks of this group, it soars over open country in search of its prey but just as often perches in a tree at the edge of a meadow, watching for the slightest movement in the grass below. The Red-tail rarely takes poultry, feeding mainly on small rodents. Certain western birds with grayish, faintly streaked or mottled tails were formerly considered a separate species called "Harlan's Hawk."

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK



Family: Accipitridae, Hawks and Eagles

Description 10-14" (25-36 cm). W. 21" (53 cm). A jay-sized, fast-flying hawk with a long, narrow, square-tipped tail and short rounded wings. Adult slate-gray above, pale below, with fine rust-colored barring. Immature birds brown above with whitish spots, creamy white below with streaks on breast, barring on flanks. Cooper's Hawk is bigger, with proportionately larger head and more rounded tail tip; flies with slower wingbeats.

Habitat Breeds in dense coniferous forests, less often in deciduous forests. During migration and in winter, may be seen in almost any habitat.

Nesting 4 or 5 whitish eggs, marked with brown, on a shallow, well-made platform of twigs concealed in a dense conifer.

Range Breeds from Alaska through Mackenzie to Newfoundland, and south to California, New Mexico, northern Gulf Coast states, and Carolinas. Winters across United States north to British Columbia and Canadian Maritimes.

Voice Sharp kik-kik-kik-kik; also a shrill squeal.

Discussion The smallest and most numerous of the accipiters, the Sharp-shinned Hawk feeds mainly on birds, which it catches in sudden and swift attacks. Its rounded wings and long narrow tail enable it to pursue birds through the woods, making sharp turns to avoid branches. In the East this species seems to be undergoing a decrease in number, perhaps because some of its prey species are also declining. Nonetheless, it is still one of the most common species at hawk migration lookouts in both the East and the West.

NORTHERN HARRIER



Female, adult

Alternate name: Marsh Hawk

Family: Accipitridae, Hawks and Eagles

Description 16-24" (41-61 cm). W. 3' 6" (1.1 m). A long-winged, long-tailed hawk with a white rump, usually seen gliding unsteadily over marshes with its wings held in a shallow V. Male has pale gray back, head, and breast; wing tips black. Female and young are brown above, streaked below, young birds with a rusty tone.

Habitat Marshes and open grasslands.

Nesting 4 or 5 pale blue or white eggs, unmarked or with light brown spots, on a mound of dead reeds and grass in a marsh or shrubby meadow.

Range Breeds from Alaska, northern Canada, and Maritime Provinces south to southern California, Arizona, Kansas, and Virginia. Winters from South America north to British Columbia, Great Lakes, and New Brunswick. Also in Eurasia.

Voice At the nest it utters a kee-kee-kee-kee or a sharp whistle, but usually silent.

Discussion This is the only North American member of a group of hawks known as harriers. All hunt by flying close to the ground and taking small animals by surprise. They seldom pursue their prey in the air or watch quietly from an exposed perch, as do other birds of prey. Harriers have keener hearing than other hawks; their disk-shaped faces, not unlike those of owls, enable them to amplify sound. This species is often known as the Marsh Hawk.

COOPER'S HAWK



Family: Accipitridae, Hawks and Eagles

Description 14-20" (36-51 cm). W. 28" (71 cm). A crow-sized hawk, with long tail and short rounded wings. Adult slate-gray above, with dark cap, and finely rust-barred below. Immature brown above, whitish below with fine streaks. Tail tip rounded, not squared-off. See Sharp-shinned Hawk.

Habitat Deciduous and, less often, coniferous forests, especially those interrupted by meadows and clearings.

Nesting 4 or 5 dull-white eggs, spotted with brown, on a bulky platform of sticks and twigs, usually more than 20' (6 m) above the ground.

Range Breeds from British Columbia east to Manitoba and Canadian Maritimes, and south to Mexico, Gulf Coast, and northern Florida; absent or local throughout much of Great Plains. Winters from Central America north to British Columbia and southern New England.

Voice Loud cack-cack-cack-cack.

Discussion Like its smaller look-alike the Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's feeds mainly on birds, which it chases relentlessly through the woods. It also takes small mammals and, in the West, lizards and snakes. During incubation and the early stages of brooding the young, the male bird does all the hunting, bringing food to both his mate and the nestlings. Cooper's Hawks mature rapidly for birds their size; a full 25 percent of young birds breed the year after they are hatched, and the rest the year after that.

NORTHERN GOSHAWK



Family: Accipitridae, Hawks and Eagles

Description 20-26" (51-66 cm). W. 3' 6" (1.1 m). A robust hawk with a long narrow tail, short rounded wings, and bold white eyebrow. Adults blue-gray above with a black crown; pale underparts finely barred with gray. Young bird similar in size and shape, but brown above, streaked below.

Habitat Breeds in coniferous forests; winters in farmlands, woodland edges, and open country.

Nesting 3 or 4 white or pale bluish eggs in a large mass of sticks lined with fresh sprigs of evergreen and placed in a tree.

Range Breeds from Alaska east through Mackenzie and northern Quebec to Newfoundland, and south to New Mexico, Great Lakes, and New England; also southward to northern Appalachians. Winters south to Virginia and Southwest.

Voice Loud kak-kak-kak-kak-kak when disturbed.

Discussion This big raptor is mainly a resident of mountainside coniferous forests. It is fearless in defense of its nest and will boldly attack anyone who ventures too close. It has recently begun extending its range to the South and now breeds in small numbers in deciduous forests.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK



Pale sub-species

Family: Accipitridae, Hawks and Eagles

Description 16-24" (41-61 cm). W. 3'4" (1 m). A large, long-winged hawk with white barring on dark wings, rusty shoulders, pale underparts barred with rust, and narrowly banded tail. In flight shows translucent area near tip of wing, visible from below. Young birds streaked below; best distinguished from young Red-tailed Hawks by somewhat smaller size, narrower tail, longer, narrower wings, and absence of white chest.

Habitat Deciduous woodlands, especially where there is standing water.

Nesting 2 or 3 white eggs, spotted with brown, in a large mass of leaves and twigs placed 20-60' (6-18 m) up in a forest tree.

Range Breeds from Minnesota east to New Brunswick and south to Gulf Coast and Florida, and on Pacific Coast in California. Winters in breeding range north to southern New England.

Voice Shrill scream, kee-yeeear, with a downward inflection.

Discussion The Red-shouldered Hawk prefers lowlands, especially swampy woods and bogs. There it hunts by watching quietly from a low perch, dropping down to capture snakes and frogs. It also eats insects and small mammals. Normally shy, these birds become tame if they are not persecuted and in some places may nest in suburban areas. During courtship a pair can be quite noisy, wheeling in the sky above their nesting territory and uttering their distinctive whistled scream.

BROAD-WINGED HAWK



Family: Accipitridae, Hawks and Eagles

Description 13-15" (33-38 cm). W. 33" (84 cm). A stocky, pigeon-sized hawk. Adult plain brown above, barred with rusty color below, with broad black-and-white tail bands. Immatures similar, but sparsely spotted or blotched below, and with tail bands less distinct.

Habitat Breeds mainly in deciduous woodlands.

Nesting 3 or 4 white eggs, with irregular brown spots, in a nest of sticks lined with green leaves placed in the crotch of a tree.

Range Breeds from Alberta east to Manitoba and Nova Scotia, south to Gulf Coast and Florida. Winters from southern Florida southward into tropics.

Voice Thin whistle, pe-heeeeeeeee?

Discussion The Broad-winged Hawk is an eastern species, best known for its spectacular migrations; often thousands of birds travel together, with single flocks numbering up to several hundred individuals. Great numbers migrate along the eastern ridges in mid-September; more than 19,000 were counted in one day as they passed over the lookout at Hawk Mountain, Pennsylvania. During breeding, this hawk is secretive or, rather, unobtrusive. It lives mainly in the woods, beneath the canopy or hidden among the foliage. Often one is made aware of it only through its call. Its food consists mainly of snakes, mice, frogs, and insects.

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK



Family: Accipitridae, Hawks and Eagles

Description 19-24" (48-61 cm). W. 4' 4" (1.3 m). A large, long-winged hawk that often hovers. Tail white at base with a dark terminal band. Light-phase adult has sandy-brown head and neck, blackish belly, and dark "wrist" marks on underside of wing. All-dark forms can usually be identified by underwing and tail pattern.

Habitat Tundra; winters on open plains, agricultural areas, and marshes.

Nesting 2-7 white eggs, speckled with brown and black, in a nest of moss and sticks placed on a cliff or rocky outcropping on the tundra.

Range Breeds in Aleutians and northern Alaska east to Baffin Island, and south to northern Manitoba and Newfoundland. Winters from southern Canada and across United States irregularly south to California, Texas, and Virginia. Also in Eurasia.

Voice Loud or soft whistles, often in a descending scale.

Discussion This large hawk often hovers above its prey like a kestrel. Lemmings, other rodents, and birds are its main sources of food during the breeding season. The number of eggs laid by the Rough-leg, like the Snowy Owl, depends on the food supply, with larger clutches occurring in years when lemmings are abundant. At a distance this hawk can be identified by its habit of hovering and by the way it perches: balancing precariously on the most slender twigs at the top of a tree. On the wintering grounds, where it takes larger rodents and upland birds, it can be strikingly tame, probably because it encounters few humans in the Far North.

AMERICAN KESTREL



Male

Family: Falconidae, Falcons

Description 9-12" (23-30 cm). W. 21" (53 cm). A jay-sized falcon, often seen hovering. Recognizable in all plumages by rusty tail and back. Adult male has slate-blue wings. Female has rusty wings and back, narrow bands on tail. Both sexes have 2 black stripes on face.

Habitat Towns and cities, parks, farmlands, and open country.

Nesting 4 or 5 white or pinkish eggs, blotched with brown, placed without nest or lining in a natural or man-made cavity.

Range Breeds from Alaska and Northwest Territories east through Maritime Provinces and south throughout continent. Winters north to British Columbia, Great Lakes, and New England. Also in American tropics.

Voice Shrill killy-killy-killy.

Discussion Unlike larger falcons, the "Sparrow Hawk" has adapted to humans and nests even in our largest cities, where it preys chiefly on House Sparrows. In the countryside it takes insects, small birds, and rodents, capturing its prey on the ground rather than in midair like other falcons. The female does most of the incubating and is fed by the male. The male calls as he nears the nest with food; the female flies to him, receives the food, and returns to the nest. After the eggs hatch, the male continues to bring most of the food. The young stay with the adults for a time after fledging, and it is not uncommon to see family parties in late summer.

PEREGRINE FALCON



Family: Falconidae, Falcons

Description 15-21" (38-53 cm). W. 3' 4" (1 m). A large robust falcon with a black hood and wide black "mustaches." Adults slate-gray above and pale below, with fine black bars and spots. Young birds brown or brownish slate above, heavily streaked below.

Habitat Open country, especially along rivers; also near lakes, along coasts, and in cities. Migrates chiefly along coasts.

Nesting 2-4 cream or buff eggs, spotted with reddish brown, placed in a scrape with little lining on a cliff or building ledge or in an abandoned bird's nest.

Range Breeds from Alaska and Canadian Arctic south locally through mountainous West, and sparingly in East. Winters coastally, north to British Columbia and Massachusetts. Also in southern South America and Old World.

Voice Rasping kack-kack-kack-kack, usually heard at nest; otherwise generally silent.

Discussion Following an alarming decline during the 1950s and 1960s, this spectacular falcon, also called the "Duck Hawk," is on the increase again, now that pesticides that caused thinning of eggshells have been banned. After an intensive program of rearing birds in captivity and releasing them in the wild (a process called "hacking"), this large falcon is reclaiming nesting grounds from which it disappeared a few decades ago. A favorite nesting site nowadays is a tall building or bridge in a city; these urban Peregrines subsist mainly on pigeons.

MERLIN



Family: Falconidae, Falcons

Description 10-14" (25-36 cm). W. 23" (58 cm). A jay-sized falcon, stockier than American Kestrel. Slate colored (males) or brownish (females) above; light and streaked below. Long tail boldly banded. Lacks facial stripes of most other falcons.

Habitat Coniferous forests; more widespread in winter.

Nesting 5 or 6 buff eggs, stippled with purple and brown, placed in a tree cavity without a nest or lining, on a rocky ledge, or in an abandoned crow's nest.

Range Breeds from Alaska east through Mackenzie to Newfoundland and south to Wyoming, Montana, and northeastern Maine. Winters mainly in southern United States north along West Coast to British Columbia and on East Coast to southern New England; locally elsewhere north to southern Canada. Also in tropical America and Eurasia.

Voice High, loud cackle, also klee-klee-klee like an American Kestrel, but usually silent.

Discussion The so-called "Pigeon Hawk" is most abundant during the migrations of smaller birds, on which it feeds. It is swift and aggressive, regularly harassing larger hawks and gulls and attacking intruders at its nest. As with other falcons, the female begins incubating as soon as the first egg is laid so the young hatch at intervals; when food is scarce, the larger young are fed first, the smaller ones sometimes dying of starvation. This seemingly heartless procedure ensures that some young will be raised successfully even in hard times.

TURKEY VULTURE



Family: Cathartidae, American Vultures

Description 25-32" (64-81 cm). W. 6' (1.8 m). Eagle-sized blackish bird, usually seen soaring over the countryside. In flight, the long wings are held upward in a wide, shallow V; flight feathers silvery below. Tail long; head small, bare, and reddish; gray in immatures. Similar to Black Vulture, but wings narrower; flaps wings less frequently and rolls and sways from side to side.

Habitat Mainly deciduous forests and woodlands; often seen over adjacent farmlands.

Nesting 2 whitish eggs, heavily marked with dark brown, placed without nest or lining in a crevice in rocks, in a hollow tree, or in a fallen hollow log.

Range Breeds from southern British Columbia, central Saskatchewan, Great Lakes, and New Hampshire southward. Winters in Southwest, and in East northward to southern New England.

Voice Usually silent; hisses or grunts when feeding or at nest.

Discussion The most common and widespread of the New World vultures, this species nests throughout all of the United States except northern New England. Soaring for hours over woodland and nearby open country, the Turkey Vulture searches for carcasses, locating them at least partly by means of its acute sense of smell. As they soar, these "buzzards" ride on rising columns of warm air called thermals to save energy as they cover miles of territory. The importance of this energy saving is clear from the fact that we seldom see a Turkey Vulture on a windless day, when thermals do not form. Turkey Vultures are valuable for their removal of garbage and disease-causing carrion. At night they often gather in large roosts.

BARRED OWL



Family: Strigidae, Owls

Description 20" (51 cm). W. 3' 8" (1.1 m). A large, stocky, dark-eyed owl. Gray-brown, with crossbarring on neck and breast and streaks on belly; no ear tufts. See Spotted Owl.

Habitat Low, wet woods and swampy forests.

Nesting 2-4 white eggs in an unlined cavity in a hollow tree or (rarely) an abandoned building; sometimes in an old crow's nest.

Range Breeds from British Columbia, Alberta, Quebec, and Nova Scotia south to northern California and throughout East to Texas and Florida.

Voice A loud barking hoo, hoo, hoo-hoo; hoo, hoo; hoo, hooo-aw! and a variety of other barking calls and screams.

Discussion This owl is most often seen by those who seek it out in its dark retreat, usually a thick grove of trees in lowland forest. There it rests quietly during the day. It sometimes calls in the daytime and if disturbed will fly easily from one grove of trees to another. It emerges at night to feed on rodents, birds, frogs, and crayfish. In recent years, this owl has been expanding its range in Washington, Oregon, and California.

GREAT HORNED OWL



Family: Strigidae, Owls

Description 25" (64 cm). W. 4' 7" (1.4 m). A large owl, varying in color from nearly white (in Arctic) to dark brown and gray. Mottled and streaked below, setting off the white throat; prominent, widely spaced ear tufts; yellow eyes.

Habitat Forests, deserts, open country, swamps, and even city parks.

Nesting 2 or 3 white eggs on the bare surface of a cliff or cave or even on the ground; in the East it most often appropriates the unused stick nest of a heron, hawk, or crow.

Range Resident throughout North America south of tree line.

Voice Series of low, sonorous, far-carrying hoots, hoo, hoo-hoo, hoo, hoo, with second and third notes shorter than the others.

Discussion The largest of American "eared" owls, the Great Horned is exceeded in size only by the rare Great Gray Owl. The Great Horned Owl preys on a wide variety of creatures, including grouse and rabbits as well as beetles, lizards, frogs, and birds, including crows, ducks, and other owls. On occasion, it even captures skunks. It is the largest and best known of the common owls. It is one of the first birds to nest, laying its eggs as early as late January, even when there is still snow on the ground.

NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL



Family: Strigidae, Owls

Description 7" (18 cm). A very small, earless, yellow-eyed owl; brown above, with white streaks on forehead, dark bill, and short tail. Juveniles are chocolate-brown above, buff below, with white triangle on forehead extending between eyes. See Boreal Owl.

Habitat Coniferous woodlands; in winter also in evergreen thickets in parks, gardens, and estates; also isolated pines.

Nesting 5 or 6 white eggs placed without a nest lining in a deserted woodpecker hole or natural cavity.

Range Breeds from southeastern Alaska, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia south to southern California, Arizona, Illinois, North Carolina (in mountains), and Connecticut. Winters in breeding range and south to Arkansas and North Carolina.

Voice Usually silent; in late winter and spring utters monotonous series of tooting whistles.

Discussion Northern Saw-whet Owls are almost entirely nocturnal, spending the day roosting quietly in dense foliage. At such times, they are extraordinarily tame and may be approached closely or even handled. At night this tiny owl becomes a rapacious hunter, preying on large insects, mice, and other small rodents. Though widespread in Canada and all of the northern and western United States, its distribution is spotty. This pattern may be attributable to uneven or inadequate food supplies in areas with severe winter conditions.

EASTERN SCREECH OWL



Family: Strigidae, Owls

Description 10" (25 cm). A small, mottled owl with prominent ear tufts; yellow eyes. Both rufous and gray color phases occur, as well as brownish intermediates.

Habitat Open deciduous woods, woodlots, suburban areas, lakeshores, old orchards.

Nesting 3-8 white eggs placed without a nest lining in a cavity in a tree or in a nest box.

Range Resident from Canada's southern prairie provinces east to southern Maine, and south to Gulf of Mexico and Florida.

Voice A tremulous, descending wail; soft purrs and trills.

Discussion These common owls are fearless in defense of their nests and will often strike unsuspecting humans on the head as they pass nearby at night. When discovered during the day, they often freeze in an upright position, depending on their cryptic coloration to escape detection. The two color phases, which vary in their relative numbers according to geography, are not based on age, sex, or season.

LONG-EARED OWL



Family: Strigidae, Owls

Description 15" (38 cm). W. 3' 3" (1 m). A nearly crow-sized owl with long ear tufts set close together. Heavily mottled brown; chestnut facial disks.

Habitat Deciduous and coniferous forests.

Nesting 4 or 5 white eggs in a deserted crow, hawk, or squirrel nest.

Range Breeds from central British Columbia, southern Mackenzie, and Quebec south to California, Arkansas, and Virginia. Winters in southern part of breeding range and in southern tier of states. Also in Eurasia.

Voice Soft low hoots; also whistles, whines, shrieks, and cat-like meows. Seldom heard except during breeding time.

Discussion Although these woodland owls are gregarious in winter, they are so quiet during the day that up to a dozen may inhabit a dense evergreen grove without being detected. They have a tendency to roost near the trunk of a tree, and since they elongate themselves by compressing their feathers, they resemble part of the trunk itself. Only by peering intently upward can one detect the round face and telltale long ear tufts. A good way to locate an owl roost is to search in pine woods for groups of pellets on the ground. These regurgitated bundles of undigested fur and bones provide an excellent indication of the bird's food habits.

SHORT-EARED OWL



Family: Strigidae, Owls

Description 16" (41 cm). A crow-sized, long-winged owl of open country. Tawny brown with rather heavy streaks below; blackish patch around each eye. Very short ear tufts are rarely visible.

Habitat Freshwater and salt marshes; open grasslands, prairies, dunes; open country generally during migration.

Nesting 5-7 white eggs in a grass-lined depression on the ground, often concealed in weeds or beneath a bush.

Range Breeds from Alaska across Canada south locally to California, Kansas, and New Jersey. Winters in southern part of breeding range and south throughout United States to Central America. Also in South America and most of Old World.

Voice Usually silent; on nesting grounds, a variety of barks, hisses, and squeals.

Discussion This owl is most commonly seen late in the afternoon as it begins to move about in preparation for a night of hunting. It can often be identified at a great distance by its habit of hovering; its flight is erratic and bounding. Occasionally several birds may be seen at once, an indication that small rodents are especially numerous.

SNOWY OWL



Family: Strigidae, Owls

Description 24" (61 cm). W. 4' 7" (1.4 m). A big, round-headed owl, ranging in color from pure white to white with dark spotting or barring. Female is larger and more heavily marked than male.

Habitat Open country: tundra, dunes, marshes, fields, plains, and airports in winter.

Nesting 5-8 white eggs with a lining of feathers, mosses, and lichens placed on open tundra.

Range Breeds in northern Alaska and in northernmost Canada. Winters south throughout Canada into northern United States, irregularly farther. Also in Eurasia.

Voice Usually silent; hoarse croak and shrill whistle on breeding grounds.

Discussion This great white owl is a beautiful sight as it perches upright on a fence post or flies over a marsh. Strictly a bird of open country, it is practically never seen in a tree; it sits on the ground, a rooftop, or other exposed resting place. In the Far North where it breeds, it depends largely on lemmings for food. The size of the lemming population periodically changes (due to population explosions and subsequent epidemics), and when lemming numbers decrease the owls must migrate southward to avoid starvation. In southern latitudes, the owls prey on rabbits, waterfowl, and other game, or on dead fish on ocean beaches. They prey on Norway rats in large refuse dumps.

BARN OWL



Family: Tytonidae, Barn Owls

Description 18" (46 cm). W. 3' 8" (1.1 m). Crow-sized. Buff-brown above and white below, with heart-shaped face and numerous fine dark dots on white underparts; dark eyes, long legs.

Habitat Open country, forest edges and clearings, cultivated areas, and cities.

Nesting 5-10 white eggs on bare wood or stone in buildings, hollow trees, caves, or even in burrows.

Range Resident from southern British Columbia, Dakotas, Michigan, and southern New England southward. Also in South America and Old World.

Voice Hissing notes, screams, guttural grunts, and bill snapping. Young give rapid grackle-like clicks.

Discussion This nocturnal ghost of a bird frequents such places as belfries, deserted buildings, and hollow trees. It hunts its food -- almost entirely rodents -- in garbage dumps, neglected cemeteries, run-down farms, and empty lots in large cities. In the glare of auto headlights, a flying Barn Owl looks snow white and so is often mistaken for a Snowy Owl. Barn Owls are effective mousers and take many rats. Owls do not digest fur and bone but periodically rid themselves of these in the form of regurgitated pellets. Barn Owl pellets are easily collected from roosts and can be a useful source of information about the small mammals in an area. Contrary to popular belief, owls see well by day, but their large eyes do give them especially good night vision. Experiments have shown, however, that Barn Owls depend on keen hearing to locate their prey. These owls appear to practice birth control: When food is scarce they lay fewer eggs or may not breed at all.